

Sensory – Mini Pumpkin Muffins

Play is how children learn. They can explore, problem solve and model what they see happening around them daily. I am sure you may think having your toddler in the kitchen 'helping' is not the best idea – but with a bit of planning, you both will discover PLAY and FUN are happening when you cook together.



Kitchen play does require some planning – have the ingredients ready to go, have them out, and you measure, and your child pours, dumps, stirs, or you could mix it all and have them help with a few parts. Stirring, smelling, shaking up the cinnamon and sugar, shaking the mini muffins in the cinnamon and sugar (I used a gallon zip lock bag to keep licked fingers out of the majority of the yummy muffins) could also be done together or separate.

Make sure you are ready for the spills, the re-directing, and the silly. Keep items out of reach you don't want your child touching – from raw eggs to hot pans, toddlers move like lightning, and safety is the priority.

Recipe: INGREDIENTS:

- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoons ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/8 teaspoons ground cloves
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup pumpkin puree
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup canola oil
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

FOR THE CINNAMON SUGAR TOPPING

- 2 tablespoons cinnamon
- 2/3 cup granulated sugar
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly oil a mini muffin pan or coat with nonstick spray.
2. Combine flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cloves, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.
3. In a large glass measuring cup or another bowl, whisk together pumpkin puree, milk, brown sugar, canola oil, egg, and vanilla.
4. Pour mixture over dry ingredients and stir using a rubber spatula just until moist.
5. Scoop the batter evenly into the muffin tray.
6. Place into oven and bake for 10-12 minutes, or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean.
7. To make the cinnamon sugar, combine cinnamon and sugar.
8. When the muffins are done, cool for 2 minutes and dip each muffin into the melted butter and then into the cinnamon-sugar mixture.
9. Let cool on a wire rack.

This type of play reinforces so many developmental skills. You are making a familiar real-life activity accessible to your child. They know this – they've watched you make food, they've watched you cook, they have eaten yummy things before – **they are experts!** Language is encouraged through this activity– labeling, naming, and choosing what they want to play within their "kitchen." Again, we want to use 1-2 word phrases to help keep the communication clear and straightforward 'crack,' 'stir' 'put in,' 'shake shake,' and of course 'MMMMM.' Eye-hand coordination is also encouraged as they pick items, heavy work lifting, and crying items for you to the counter, opening up lids, maybe even pouring. If there are siblings, this is a great group activity. Each child will be at their level of play, and having models of those levels of play is a natural way to help grow in all areas.

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Sidenote: My daughter was never a big TV watcher. *But, if she heard Paula Deen say, “Hey, Y’all,” she would come running into the living room!* My 15-month-old was obsessed with the kitchen. I had her help everywhere I could see in the kitchen. She would decorate cookies at her highchair, help ‘wash’ dishes, spread butter on something, sprinkle, pound crumble. She is 12 now, and she LOVES cooking and baking to this day. Our children learn through their play.



Lesson plan submitted by AnnMarie Adams

Recipe Link for reference by the blog "[Pumpkin Donut Holes - Damn Delicious](#)"

Photo credit from "Damn Delicious"

Photo credit from AnnMarie Adams, daughter (15 mo-18 mo)